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Information Outlook, January/February 2013

Special Libraries Association

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THE MAGAZINE OF THE SPECIAL LIBRARIES ASSOCIATION



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Transform Knowledge and Expertise into Strategic Value

Keeping yourself 'sustainable' through SLA programs and volunteer opportunities can prepare you to exploit emerging career options.

BY DEB HUNT, SLA PRESIDENT



As I start my year as SLA president, I would like to pose a question and challenge to all of us: How do we transform knowledge and expertise into strategic value in our careers, our workplaces and our profession?

Trends related to LIS (library and information sciences) employment show that in 2007, 15 percent of our employers were not libraries. Just one year later, that share had almost doubled, to 27 percent.

With that in mind, here is a sampling of emerging job titles in our profession:

- Metadata librarian;
- Human factors engineer;
- Information architect;
- Brand archivist;
- Knowledge manager;
- Library partnerships manager;
- User experience researcher;
- Digital initiatives librarian; and
- Taxonomist.

The skills required and requested by employers and clients continue to expand and change, and we must change with them. I see many of my colleagues struggling with layoffs and job insecurity; some have been unemployed for several months. There are vast opportunities for information professionals, and I want to see us benefit from those opportunities.

The evolution of my consulting work illustrates those opportunities. When I started consulting many years ago, I

mostly performed value-added research and library creation and automation duties. Soon, my library automation clients began asking me how to organize their internally created assets so they would be as easily accessible as the

library collection. That is how I added document, digital asset and enterprise content management to the services I offer. Today, most of my clients are not libraries.

As Stephen Abram has noted (I'm paraphrasing here), "LIS skills are good currency, but only for those with the flexibility and insight to exploit the opportunities."

Be Ready to Leap

As information professionals, we have core skills and resources. We must add flexibility, insight, and recognition of opportunity to our essential core skills. We need to move outside our comfort zone and reflect on our accomplishments so we can communicate them to current, future and prospective employers and clients. If we don't, how will they know what we can do and what we bring to the table?

LIS jobs are being created in a whole

different way than they were 10 or even 5 years ago. We need to be resilient, taking our skills with us no matter where we go. Career sustainability is about growing in our current jobs and preparing for future jobs as well, by continuing to deepen our expertise and experience and demonstrate the strategic value we provide.

We have much potential and energy to move us forward to career sustainability and strategic value. We can—and must—make change happen. No one else is going to do it for us. We have to be ready to leap off the edge into

Are you volunteering in SLA to make it a better association and add to your skill set? If not, why not?

the future, not blindly but as prepared as possible to get where we want and need to be.

We have tools at our disposal to help us chart our career path rather than let others determine where and when we are needed. SLA, for example, provides many resources for us to utilize, such as the 23 Things online learning program, ClickU offerings, and Webinars from almost every unit, not to mention the Annual Conference and Leadership Summit.

Like many other professional associations, SLA is experiencing challenges, but we are on a steady path. Our CEO, staff, board members and unit heads are working hard to make SLA thrive, but we can always use more help. Are you volunteering in SLA to make it a better association and add to your skill set? If not, why not?

All of us have family and work

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John Walsh

SLA
331 S. Patrick Street
Alexandria, Virginia 22314
Phone: +1.703.647.4917
Fax: +1.703.647.4901
jwalsh@sla.org

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demands, but we can all pitch in, even a little bit, to improve SLA. When my children were small, I volunteered in ways that let me be at home with them, such as editing newsletters or serving as a Webmaster. As they grew up, I volunteered more. Today, much of my consulting work derives from the networking I conducted while volunteering for SLA.

Do you want to move up or improve your skill set? Volunteer! Do you want to network? Volunteer!

Believe it or not, I was very shy when I attended my first SLA meetings. I didn't know anyone, but I set a goal to introduce myself to at least five people at each event. I started out volunteering in a very small capacity and, along the way, learned new skills and met

new colleagues who have become my friends. You can do this, too.

Making Change Happen

I'm passionate about what I do and what we as a profession can do. Together we can create a more healthy and sustainable future as we grow our skillset and shout from the rooftops the value that we bring to our employers, potential employers and clients. Let's get to work. Together we can make change happen.

I will leave you with my opening challenge: How do we transform knowledge and expertise into strategic value in our careers, our workplaces and our profession? For good measure, I'll add a second: Who is going to steer your career path? **SLA**

Letters

Not Nearly Enough

Meeting users' expectations (the theme of the Nov/Dec 2012 issue) is not nearly enough. Special library users, trained by their experiences with the reactivity and passivity of public and school librarians, expect far too little. They have to be educated to learn what they have the right to expect.

But how do we do this when we don't even have the resources to provide what they do expect without reaping either blame or frustration (or both)? Peter Drucker told all of us a long time ago, and he earned a great deal more than any of us ever will.

What we give our bosses is either credit or blame. If they support us, they get most of the credit for what we accomplish, perhaps even all of it. If they thwart us in our desire to provide what we have taught our users to demand, they get the blame, perhaps all of it. Make sure your boss understands that credit is better than blame. Without either of these factors, their role, for which they seek and get credit, is simply to make your operation cheap.

Is there risk in all of this? Of course—

management is a contact sport. I retired almost 20 years ago, but if the risks are now greater, so is the importance of what we do, and therefore also the potential for reward. If you are willing to settle for a little, there is no bottom to how little that might become. You cannot ingratiate yourself by being cheap, only by being valuable.

I'm not just blowing hot air. I did this for 25 years and taught it for 20.

Herbert S. White
Tucson, Arizona, USA
SLA President, 1968-69

Potential Security Issues

I found the Nov/Dec 2012 article on near field communication of great interest. I found it a bit disturbing that the author did not once mention any potential security issues. A quick search on Google will find there are many potential risks. Such articles on new technologies must cover the benefits as well as the risks of using them.

Wilfred (Bill) Drew
Croop-LaFrance, Inc.
Technical Librarian
U.S. Air Force Research Library
Rome, New York, USA



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STRATEGIC AGENDA

Fellows to Promote Strategic Agenda

The SLA Board of Directors has asked the SLA Fellows to help chapter and division leaders incorporate the association's strategic agenda into the decisions their units make.

A strategic agenda is a set of guiding principles that govern a decision-making process. In 2011, the board adopted a strategic agenda for 2012-2014 after evaluating SLA's long-term goals and objectives. The elements that comprise the agenda are as follows:

- The annual conference;
- Professional development;
- Creating a richer volunteer experience;
- Opening new markets through collaboration; and
- Growth through diversification.

SLA Fellows will be contacting 2013 unit leaders to discuss how to make the most of the strategic agenda process for their respective units. SLA Fellows Gloria Zamora and Libby Trudell are coordinating the effort.

Board OKs Merger of DBF, DAM

The SLA Advertising and Marketing Division (DAM) has merged with the Business and Finance Division (DBF).

The SLA Board of Directors approved the merger at its December meeting; the merger took effect on 1 January. Prior to the board's vote, members of both divisions had approved the merger at their respective annual business meetings and in electronic balloting conducted after the business meetings.

DAM's board initiated the merger after failing to develop the leadership necessary to continue as a division. Approximately 45 percent of DAM's members already belonged to DBF, making it the obvious "home" for DAM members.

With the merger, DAM no longer exists. All DAM members are now DBF members and also members of its Advertising and Marketing Section. **SLA**

WIKIPEDIAN • INTERNET ACCESS • MONETIZING DATA

Wikipedia Places Editor at Presidential Library

A student in the University of Michigan's School of Information has become the first "Wikipedian in residence" at a presidential library in the United States.

Michael Barera, who has been editing articles on Wikipedia for five years, will be responsible for increasing and enhancing the presence of the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Library on the popular online encyclopedia. Many archives and museums (including the National Archives) have Wikipedians in residence, but Barera is the first at a presidential library.

A Wikipedian in residence is a Wikipedia editor who is, in essence, embedded in an organization. Barera was appointed to the position after attending a Wikimedia Foundation seminar where he met Bettina Cousineau, exhibit specialist at the Ford Library and Museum. He soon began volunteering his time and skills to locate Wikipedia articles about President Ford for the library and museum's staff to fact-check. He also created tags and templates on the site.

Online Users Showing Depth, Not Breadth, Survey Shows

The number of North Americans who go online each month appears to have leveled off, but those who do are spending more time there, according to a recent survey of nearly 60,000 residents of the United States and Canada.

The survey, conducted annually by Forrester Research, found that roughly four-fifths of adults went online on a monthly basis in 2012, the same share as in 2011. But the percentage who went online every day climbed to 84 percent, up from 78 percent the previous year. That increase is due at least partly to the growing use of mobile devices—today, half of adults who go online own a smartphone, and two-thirds of them own multiple Internet-

connected devices. The rate of tablet adoption, meanwhile, has more than doubled since 2011 and now stands at approximately 19 percent.

When asked where they use their smartphones to access the Internet, 75 percent said stores and 74 percent said cars, making them the preferred locations. Libraries, on the other hand, scored lowest among 16 options—only 20 percent of respondents said they use their smartphone to access the Internet while in a library.

The survey report presents additional findings and also provides an overview of how different generations use technology inside and outside the home. To access the report, visit www.forrester.com.

More Companies Expected to Monetize Information Assets

Librarians may be able to take advantage of a coming trend in information management—harvesting, packaging and selling information assets to help companies offset the costs of storing and managing their data.

Gartner, a leading information technology research and advisory firm, anticipates that by 2016, 30 percent of businesses will try to directly or indirectly monetize their information assets by trading, bartering or selling them.

Gartner researchers say many companies are beginning to recognize that their information assets have market value, both within their own industries and, in some cases, outside them as well. But these companies often are ill-equipped to develop and introduce information-based products, so a new category of intermediaries called "information resellers" or "information product managers" will arise to help organizations develop and execute monetization strategies. These intermediaries could be either internal or external to the company, and librarians probably will possess many of the skills they need to succeed.

"Several retailers are already generating millions of dollars per year in incremental revenue by placing online their point-of-sale and other data for business partners to subscribe to," says Doug Laney, research vice president at Gartner. "Other individuals have launched ventures packaging and reselling publicly available data, or using it to launch new information-based products, such as in the insurance and financial markets."

Gartner says it has developed valuation models that can help organizations gauge the potential and realized economic value of their information assets. For more information, visit www.gartner.com.

Adaptive E-Book Debuts at Consumer Electronics Show

An e-book that assesses students' knowledge and skill levels as they read and highlights content to focus their attention on unfamiliar topics and concepts was introduced at the 2013 International Consumer Electronics Show (CES) in Las Vegas.

McGraw-Hill Education launched a suite of adaptive learning products at CES that use advanced technological engines to improve learning and student performance. The suite includes SmartBook™, which departs from the traditional concept of a book as a linear medium designed to be experienced in a pre-defined sequence.

Adaptive learning is a method of education that seeks to personalize learning by using algorithmic technology to continually assess students' knowledge, skill and confidence levels and design targeted study paths based on the resulting data. The goal is to bolster students' understanding in the areas where they most need to improve.

In addition to the SmartBook, the suite of adaptive products includes the following:

- A "before-the-course" adaptive resource designed to prepare stu-

dents entering complex courses (such as anatomy or organic chemistry) with the knowledge and skills they need to be successful on the first day of class;

- A photo-realistic virtual lab experience that uses adaptive technology to enable meaningful scientific exploration and learning while eliminating many of the practical challenges of a physical lab setting; and
- A self-paced adaptive learning system that pinpoints students' areas of weakness and supplies them with targeted content and on-the-spot tutoring.

The suite can be adopted on an institution-wide basis, although McGraw-Hill Education also plans to offer the products to students or their parents to purchase directly. For more information, visit learnsmart.prod.customer.mcgraw-hill.com/about/news-press/.

Library Users Open to More Technology Services

As libraries have incorporated more technology into their services, patrons have become accustomed to it and now expect free access, according to a recent survey of more than 2,200 U.S. adults.

In the survey, conducted by the Pew Research Center's Internet & American Life Project, 77 percent of respondents said free access to computers and the Internet is a "very important" library service. That share was exceeded, though only slightly, by borrowing books (80 percent) and making reference librarians available (also 80 percent).

Significant percentages of respondents said they would like libraries to offer additional technology-based services, including the following:

- Apps-based access to library materials and programs (63 percent); and
- GPS-navigation apps to help users locate material inside library buildings (62 percent).

When asked about their personal library usage, one-fourth said they had used computers and the Internet at their library in the past 12 months, and a similar share said they had visited a library Website. One in seven said they had accessed library materials through a smartphone or tablet.

Notwithstanding their growing fondness for technology, many library patrons still enjoy using printed materials. More than one-third of respondents said libraries should "definitely not" move printed books out of public locations to make room for tech centers, cultural events, and meetings, while only one-fifth said libraries "definitely" should.

"The level of public eagerness for new services seems to be matched by wariness of changes in traditional library activities that patrons have used for years," says Lee Rainie, director at the Pew Internet Project and co-author of a report on the survey results. "These findings paint a picture of a public that wants its libraries to be all things to all patrons. There is no clear roadmap of public priorities for libraries, so different communities will likely come up with different mixes of services as they move into the future."

The Pew Internet Project explores the impact of the Internet on children, families, communities, workplaces, schools, and civic/political life. More information is available at www.pewinternet.org. **SLA**

- Online research services that allow patrons to pose questions and get answers from librarians (73 percent);
- Access to technology "petting zoos" to test new devices (69 percent);

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New Twists on an Old Favorite

STRATEGIC PLANNING IS GETTING A MAKEOVER BY BUSINESS LEADERS, AND INFORMATION PROFESSIONALS CAN BENEFIT BY TAKING A SIMILAR APPROACH.

BY STUART HALES

Strategic planning is dead. Long live strategic planning!

As the global economy continues to sputter, with each new piece of good news seemingly giving rise to fresh worries—the failing economies of Spain and Greece, the stalemate over the U.S. “fiscal cliff,” the energy crisis in Brazil—more and more organizations are saying goodbye to the time-honored strategic planning process. In its stead, these companies are turning to new concepts such as strategic thinking and strategic agility, or are tweaking the traditional 5-year plan and adopting a much shorter timeline, one measured in months rather than years.

A recent *Wall Street Journal* article captured this trend and the forces driving it. “Strategic Plans Lose Favor,” the headline stated, and interviews with executives at Office Depot, Whirlpool, J.C. Penney and other companies

underscored the sentiment.

“Strategy, as we know it, is dead,” Walt Shill of consulting firm Accenture told the article’s authors. “Corporate clients decided that increased flexibility and accelerated decision making are much more important than simply predicting the future.”

To be sure, many business leaders and analysts contend that reports of strategic planning’s death are an exaggeration. The problem, they say, is that strategic plans too often are developed and then set aside, not continually reviewed and adjusted. Without a defined destination and an up-to-date road map for reaching it, organizations cannot hope to influence their future, let alone control it.

For business units within organizations (such as libraries and information centers), the uncertainty over strategic planning raises additional questions.

Should they develop their own strategic plan? If so, should it support or reflect the organization’s overall plan? (What if the organization doesn’t have one, or doesn’t communicate it to managers and employees?) Should the business unit use the same process—e.g., strategic thinking—that senior management used for its plan?

Another issue that often arises in regard to strategic planning is deciding whom to involve in the process. The Wikimedia Foundation, parent of the online encyclopedia, decided in 2010 to develop its strategy in the same manner as it develops its products: by asking its community of contributing editors for their input. Libraries and information centers may be tempted to emulate this approach and invite their stakeholders into the planning process, though they must first make a compelling case for participation and then make it as easy as possible to participate.

STUART HALES is senior writer/editor at SLA and editor of *Information Outlook*.



Planning, Thinking, Engaging

This issue of *Information Outlook* offers three perspectives on these and other considerations involved in strategic planning. In “Strategic Planning: Providing a Benchmark,” Nicola Franklin draws on her background in planning and

Rajesh Singh, an assistant professor in the School of Library and



A common theme running through the three articles is that all employees, including information professionals,

“Since I started presenting workshops in the library sector—for example, on marketing library services—I’ve found that remarkably few attendees know their organization’s mission, values or vision,” Nicola Franklin concludes. “Perhaps they feel that, because they work in the library, the mission, values and vision of their employer aren’t relevant to them. I disagree. Information professionals need to know where the organization as a whole is heading so they can create strategic plans and offer services that will help the organization get where it wants to go.” **SLA**

Lublin, Joann S., and Dana Mattioli. 2010. Strategic Plans Lose Favor. *Wall Street Journal*, 25 January.

Strategic Planning: Providing a Benchmark

ORGANIZATIONS AND THEIR INFORMATION CENTERS AND LIBRARIES NEED A BIG, BOLD STATEMENT THAT SAYS WHAT THEY'RE ALL ABOUT, WHAT THEY'RE FOR, WHO THEY'RE FOR, AND WHERE THEY'RE GOING.

BY NICOLA FRANKLIN, BSC, FIRP

Does your library or membership group really need a strategic plan? After all, the term *strategic plan* does sound a bit grand and rather corporate. Aren't strategic plans just for big banks and law firms?

I've worked at both a major corporation (Manpower) and in small enterprises. Some of my employers had clear strategic plans, others had some sort of plan, and a few had no plan at all. Based on my observations, I'd say that all these organizations, no matter the size, would have benefited from a good, regularly updated strategic plan.

A Big, Bold Statement

So, what is a strategic plan? First, it is distinct from a business plan. A business plan is a detailed description of the services, customers and objectives of a

business, business unit or other group. It is heavy on financial data and other numeric details and is based on moving from the current situation to some future state. A business plan focuses on how the resources available to the organization are going to be managed to get you there.

A strategic plan, on the other hand, is both shorter and broader in scope than a business plan. It starts off by looking at a desired future state, irrespective of where you are now. Following are a few definitions of strategic planning that I came across while conducting research for this article:

"...planning for growth"
www.businesslink.com

"...defining direction"
Wikipedia

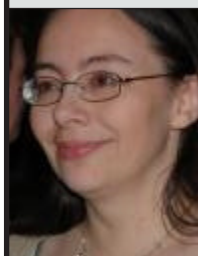
"...key decisions that need to be made in order to thrive"
www.simply-strategic-planning.com

"...organizing the present on the basis of projections of a desired future"
SLA Strategic Planning Handbook

"...envisioning a desired future"
www.businessdictionary.com

I particularly like the last of these as a place to start. A strategy is a big, bold statement—it says what your organization is all about, what it's for, who it's for, and where it's going. The planning part has to do with how to move toward your vision or ultimate goal.

The leading guru of corporate strategic planning is Henry Mintzberg, a professor of management studies at McGill University in Montreal. In one of his seminal works (Mintzberg 1994), he made the point that strategic planning



NICOLA FRANKLIN has worked in the recruitment field for 20 years and has been finding jobs for library and information professionals since 1997. She worked for Informed Business Services, PFJ and Sue Hill Recruitment before establishing her own recruitment and career coaching firm, The Library Career Centre, in 2011. She studied strategy, marketing and operations as part of her recent MBA work at Henley Business School and has gained a wealth of practical planning experience during her career. She can be reached at librarycareercentre@gmail.com.

can get too formalized, with the emphasis on planning instead of on thinking. He advocates adopting a broad vision that can and does adapt to changing environments.

If you read some management textbooks and articles, you will soon notice that there are many methods and models you can use to “do” strategic planning: goal-based, issue-based, scenario planning, the organic model, the driver’s model, and so on. If you look closely, however, you’ll notice they tend to have the same elements in common. Some contain them all, some pick and mix, some are more formalized, but there are more similarities than differences among them. For simplicity’s sake, I’ll try and synthesize them into one description.

To create a vision for your organization—that is, to envision a desired future for it—you need two things. First, you need to have a clear picture of the organization’s mission and values. What does the organization stand for, and what does it believe in? Second, you need an appreciation of the external environment. What is going on around the organization, and what are the key trends that will affect it over the next few years?

Creating a Strategic Vision

What does a strategic vision look like? It is a short statement (only a paragraph or two) that sets out where the leaders and/or managers envision the organization being in a few years’ time. A strategic vision for a library association might look like this:

In 3–4 years’ time, AnyGroup will have a membership of [number of members] drawn from across the [geographic region] area, and a membership income of [monetary amount]. It will be offering online education programs, a virtual and physical seminar and conference program, networking events, and learning resources to support continuing professional development of its members. AnyGroup will be part of the wider [name of organization

or industry group] network and will partner with complementary groups to offer a wider range of services to members.

As you read this vision statement, think back to the key elements needed to create a vision and particularly to the organization’s mission and values. What is a mission statement? Some companies have their mission statement on their Websites, and they can seem like a lot of buzz words and “corporate speak” cobbled together with no real meaning. However, a genuine mission statement can be very useful as a way of making sure everyone understands what the organization does, what (and who) it’s for, and, just as importantly, what and who it isn’t for.

A mission statement for AnyGroup, for example, could read like this:

AnyGroup delivers programs for members that enable their continuing professional development. These include formal training programs and peer-to-peer learning and networking opportunities. AnyGroup also advocates on behalf of members, sets professional standards, and promotes the value of members to the organizations that hire them. AnyGroup’s programs are designed to meet the needs of members living and working in the [geographic region] area at [types of organizations].”

Mission statements can be useful for evaluating ideas that are put forward. There are many things an organization *could* do, but there almost certainly isn’t enough time or money to accomplish them all. The mission statement therefore acts like a filter, disqualifying ideas that do not fit the core purpose of the organization.

I once worked at an organization that didn’t have a mission statement, a vision, or a strategic plan. The staff were encouraged to put forward ideas, some of which were taken up. However, there didn’t appear to be any rhyme or reason for selecting ideas for implementation—it seemed to be a case of what we had the capacity to do at that

moment, and the things we could do got the go-ahead. The result was an organization that “ticked along” without growing, developing or going anywhere in particular.

To formulate your mission statement, convene a brainstorming session with the top managers of the library or organization or, if time and resources allow, involve a wider group, such as the library’s customers or the organization’s members. Simply asking straightforward questions like “What do you think this organization is for?” and “What services would you like to see offered?” can reveal some interesting information about how the organization is perceived and what people need and want.

In addition to identifying your organization’s mission, you also need to recognize the values it holds. These almost certainly already exist, although maybe they are implicitly understood rather than explicitly stated. (For example, there are probably some things that no one within the organization would want it to do that are just taken for granted.) To generate a vision of where you would like the organization to go, it is useful to spend some time surfacing these values. Ask lots of questions, such as the following:

- “What would we do in xxx situation?”
- “Why would we behave like that?”
- “What would we spend money on (or not)?”
- “What ideas have we rejected in the past, and why?”

Monitoring the Environment

Once you have a clear idea of your internal landscape, it’s time to consider the outside environment. What trends are affecting society, the economy and your organization’s sector at the moment? A well-known method of surveying the environment of an organization is to perform a PESTLE analysis (political, economic, social, technological, legal and environmental analysis). During a workshop or brainstorming session, consider what’s happening outside your

organization in each of these areas. Where are things headed? How could external developments affect your organization?

Once you have a clear view of your organization's mission and values and the environment in which it's operating, you are ready to envision where you'd like it to be in three or four years' time. Do you want to have more staff and/or revenues? New audience(s)? Different products or services? Do you want to be moving in a different direction—for example, toward a more virtual/digital offering or one that capitalizes on the library having a physical space to offer for collaborative projects or events? Are there sufficient resources (staff, time, and money) to do both?

Writing and Revising the Plan

Having done all of this preparatory work, you're ready to write your strategic plan. The plan should consist of short, concise paragraphs covering these areas:

- Mission;
- Values;
- External environment;
- Vision;
- Goals;
- Objectives; and
- Action plans.

The detailed objectives and action plans could be inserted into a business plan document, with just top-line summaries included in the strategic plan.

Because strategic plans are long-range tools and involve working toward a vision of how you'd like the future to look, they need to be flexible. Things can (and probably will) change along the way. Your plan needs to be able to change as well, and you'll need to revisit it regularly—perhaps every six months.

If something in your strategic plan isn't unfolding as anticipated, you need to determine what's causing the problem. You might easily come up with one or two top-level factors that are affecting

the situation, but it's important to drill down beyond the things that immediately spring to mind to identify the root cause of the problem. Drilling down involves asking a lot of "So what?" and "Why is that?" types of questions. Every time you think of a reason for something, ask "Why are things like that?" Keep going until you can't think of any more causes.

Consider the following example of why membership numbers aren't on target to meet the goal stated in the strategic plan of a membership organization.

Because the organization isn't seen as relevant by non-members, because its program of offerings isn't relevant to them, because the organization doesn't have the capacity to research their needs and develop new programs, because the volunteer managers are focused on the logistics of running the next event since that's what they feel confident doing, because they haven't had training on how to develop learning programs, because the organization can't afford to offer it, because it doesn't have enough capital for investment, because it hasn't sought sponsorship and relies on membership dues and event fees.

Eventually you get down to the root cause: membership numbers aren't growing because of a lack of investment. This example illustrates how digging down below the surface can help you uncover a range of causal factors and can focus your efforts on addressing the real problem.

One of the advantages of having a strategic plan is that it provides your organization with a benchmark, something against which to measure your progress. To monitor progress, you need to turn your "big picture" vision into a set of goals and break each large goal into individual objectives. You can then create action plans, assign staff and other resources to achieve them, and compare "before" and "after" numbers to see how you're progressing.

Seeing the Whole Plan

When I worked at Manpower in the mid-1990s as a branch manager, I didn't get to see the whole strategic plan. What trickled down to my level through our regional managers was the "big vision" and the objectives and targets that resulted from the overall goal. We all knew that Manpower's vision was to be the biggest and best temporary staffing agency in the world. We also knew what this meant—that when we were asked what growth our branch would deliver the next year, our regional managers weren't asking for a realistic assessment. Anything less than a projection of double-digit growth wasn't acceptable, and it was up to us to make it happen.

Since I started presenting workshops in the library sector—for example, on marketing library services—I've found that remarkably few attendees know their organization's mission, values or vision. Perhaps they feel that, because they work in the library, the mission, values and vision of their employer aren't relevant to them. I disagree. Information professionals need to know where the organization as a whole is heading so they can create strategic plans and offer services that will help the organization get where it wants to go. **SLA**

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Adapting to the New Strategic Planning

LIBRARIES MUST BE ABLE TO ACT QUICKLY AND STAY FOCUSED SO THEY CAN TAKE ADVANTAGE OF OPPORTUNITIES THAT CONTRIBUTE TO ORGANIZATIONAL SUCCESS.

BY HOLLY G. GREEN

Back when the world moved a lot slower and markets didn't change overnight, the traditional strategic planning model served the corporate world quite well. It got business leaders to rise above the day-to-day minutiae of running the business and focus on the big picture. And it gave everyone a sense of direction and purpose, at least for a little while.

But the world has changed dramatically since strategic planning was first introduced. We still need to plan—in fact, planning is probably more important than ever. What needs to change is *how* we plan, how we go about *implementing* our plans, and how we *think* about the planning process in general.

Traditional strategic planning involves looking ahead three to five years, predicting where the company needs to go, and setting a firm course in that direction. Once the plan has been crafted,

it typically gets rolled out with great fanfare, and for about one-tenth of a second everyone in the organization is actually working from the same page. But then a curious thing happens—management typically puts the plan high up on the shelf and leaves it there. They stop communicating with employees about the strategies and goals included in the plan and assume that the plan will unfold exactly as written.

Instead of monitoring the plan on a regular basis, management sits back and waits for it to produce the expected results. When it starts to get off track, as every plan does, management typically adopts a wait-and-see attitude, preferring to ride out any bumps in the plan rather than make any “unnecessary” adjustments. The end result is a business that struggles to achieve its goals and employees who have no clue where the organization is headed or how it will get there.

Today's business world has become

too complex and moves far too quickly to waste time and resources crafting rigid strategic plans that become obsolete before they get halfway through their time frame. Clearly, a new planning model and mindset are needed to enable companies to respond quickly to changes in dynamic, unstable markets while remaining focused on the goal.

Updating the Model

What does the new strategic planning model look like?

For starters, it's a lot more fluid and flexible. You still set a target destination, but one that doesn't look nearly as far into the future. And you still set intermediate goals and action steps to help you reach your destination. But instead of putting the plan up on the shelf to gather dust, the focus shifts to monitoring and measuring the plan on a regular basis and making adjustments in response to changing market conditions.

Instead of planning three to five years out, companies now look 12 to 18 months ahead. They set new targets based not only on past performance but on the opportunities available in the market, taking into account what achieving excellence in a new and constantly evolving game looks like. They still set a firm destination, but now they build plenty of flexibility into how they

HOLLY GREEN is CEO of The Human Factor, Inc., which helps business leaders and their companies achieve excellence. She previously served as president of The Ken Blanchard Company and LumMed, Inc. Holly's clients include Microsoft, Hilton Worldwide, Edwards LifeSciences, SKLZ, and Google. She is the author of *More Than a Minute: How to be an Effective Leader & Manager in Today's Changing World*. She can be reached at holly@thehumanfactor.biz.



Rather than holding on to what has made them successful so far, libraries and information centers need to explore what they can do differently to add value in today's radically different markets.

will get there and enable those closest to the work to make day-to-day decisions about reaching the destination.

Most importantly, instead of putting the plan on the shelf to collect dust, companies now make implementing the plan a top priority. They review it on a regular basis and make adjustments as necessary. In the process, they continuously address “here is why we will still win” even when markets and conditions shift or plans unfold differently than expected.

Strategic Agility: The New Edge

A primary goal of the new strategic planning model is the development of strategic agility—the ability of companies to move fast, stay focused, and remain flexible in rapidly changing markets. This goal requires the entire organization, not just senior management, to become fluent in strategic thinking.

Whereas strategic planning is a one-time event that has a beginning and an end, strategic thinking is a process that never ends. While strategic planning typically is conducted by senior management and usually results in a formal written plan, strategic thinking becomes an integral part of how the organization conducts its business and needs to be practiced by employees at all levels.

To develop the skill of strategic thinking, you must do the following:

- **Focus on a target.** Start by creating a very clear picture of what winning looks like for your organization (division, team, project, etc.). Make sure it is linked to the organization's overall objectives and definition of
- winning, then communicate it over and over and over.
- **Ask the right questions.** When you can't have all the data, the only alternative is to ask the right questions. Good questions get people to look at the same data differently, so you get many different perspectives on any given issue. Good questions also shift the energy, so people look to find what *will* work instead of what won't.
- **Balance the big picture and the details along the way.** Here's where strategic thinking really diverges from strategic planning. With strategic planning, you set a firm course and stick to it as much as possible, allowing only minor deviations from the plan; strategic thinking, on the other hand, focuses on the target (big picture) while staying open and flexible to changing what it takes to get there (the details).
- **Explore new channels.** Strategic thinking also requires broadening your horizons and expanding your data-gathering efforts beyond traditional sources. What's happening beyond the walls of your business and industry? Where else can you look to learn? How can you develop new ways of communicating and connecting with key stakeholders?
- **Teach strategic thinking skills.** Teach people at all levels to anticipate opportunities and threats while managing their day-to-day tasks and responsibilities. Give them the training, coaching and mentoring to

become more responsive to changing customer needs. Develop their problem-solving skills and help them understand how their decisions and actions will affect the business in the future as well as today.

- **Stage your field of vision.** Most of all, strategic thinking requires focusing daily on your vision of winning. How will you keep the right things in front of you to direct your attention, energy, and thoughts on winning? How can you get them in front of others? How will you stay clear on winning when major challenges and obstacles arise?

Companies and teams that develop strategic agility find themselves able to respond to changing market conditions more quickly than their competitors, putting them in a position of market leadership. Those that don't usually find themselves playing catch-up.

Rethinking Your Value

How does this new planning model affect today's libraries and information centers?

The primary focus of any strategic plan is to enable the organization to win—i.e., reach its destination. When an organization lacks a clear destination, it usually has many ill-defined ones. Employees feel unmotivated and uncommitted. Time, talent and resources get wasted on products and projects that go nowhere. People end up working on their own personal agendas rather than doing what's best for the company.

Having a clear definition of winning provides focus and clarity at the individual, team and organizational levels. It gets everyone aligned and moving in the same direction. And it motivates and inspires people to perform at their best. When employees know where they're going and what they need to do to get there, it becomes much easier to reach the destination.

The key to success, therefore, is to make sure everyone in the organization is on the same page and working

toward the same definition of winning. However, these days, many libraries and information centers in businesses and government agencies are focused primarily on survival. When faced with drastically reduced budgets or even outright elimination, they often mistake survival as a win, which leads them to engage in behaviors and pursue goals that may not support the organization's definition of winning.

In today's economy, staying alive is not a win—it merely postpones the inevitable. To win, libraries and information centers need to start thinking differently about how they add value to the organization. All business units have to demonstrate value in order to survive, but now they may have to do it in ways they never thought about before, and that requires strategic thinking and flexibility. Rather than holding on to what has made them successful so far, libraries and information centers need to explore what they can do differently to add value in today's radically different markets.

Supporting the Plan

Here's the million-dollar question for today's libraries and information centers: When senior management develops an over-arching strategic plan for the organization, what role does your business unit play in supporting it? Should you develop a separate plan to achieve your own goals (such as surviving)? Or do you focus strictly on supporting the organization's overall plan?

The answer is: you do both.

Individual business units can (and, in most cases, should) have their own plans. In every case, however, these plans must cascade down from, and fully support, the overall corporate objectives. In today's business environment, that's how you demonstrate the value of your business unit to the organization—by setting departmental goals and objectives that support achieving the organization's most important strategic goals. That's also how you survive, so you at least have a chance to win.

For the organization to win, every-

one in the boat must be rowing in sync. Every rower has a different job, but each job contributes to the overall picture. Leaders of libraries and information centers need to ask themselves these questions: What does our team need to do to support the overall plan and get us to our destination? What is our piece in that? How do we add value to the organization in ways that support the company's definition of winning?

In some cases, senior management may do a poor job of communicating the destination or may not communicate it at all, which makes it difficult to answer these critical questions. If you don't have access to the overall corporate strategy, look to other sources to glean the information you need. For example, press releases can provide insight into the company's strategic direction. Annual reports often present a forward-looking view of what is most important to the organization. Outside sources, such as analysts' reviews and industry reports, can provide third-party perspectives on where your company is or needs to be.

When faced with a lack of communication, don't just make up information to fill in the blanks. Instead, look to these and other sources for the information you need to align your business unit with the company's overall direction.

The secret to winning in today's competitive markets is to keep everyone informed, inspired and engaged in the journey together. Start by recognizing that strategic planning has become a very fluid, flexible, ongoing process, one in which your business unit plays a critical role even if it isn't involved in creating the plan. Educate your team about where the company is going and why it's important to win. Shift your team's focus from mere survival to helping the company win and demonstrate your team's value to the organization by finding new and better ways to support the strategic plan. Make your team an indispensable component in the organization's journey to its destination, and issues of budget cuts and survival will disappear. **SLA**

A More Holistic Approach: Strategic Engagement

USING STRATEGIC ENGAGEMENT, LIBRARY LEADERS CAN FOSTER A MORE STRATEGICALLY ORIENTED CULTURE FOR THE LONG-TERM HEALTH AND SUCCESS OF THEIR ORGANIZATION.

BY RAJESH SINGH, PHD

Strategic planning is certainly not a new topic in the library profession. The need for strategic planning is well accepted, and strategic planning is being performed on some level in many information organizations, whether in small-scale staff meetings or full-blown strategic planning retreats complete with external consultants. However, many information professionals still struggle to create an effective strategic plan for their library.

They are not alone. A study by the American Management Association found that the most important competency for a leader is the ability to develop strategy, but only 4 percent of leaders were found to be effective strategists when leaders were examined at all levels in organizations (Horwath 2009). Similarly, my 2011 survey of senior library and information profes-

sionals in Kansas found that only a few of them mentioned strategic planning as playing a role in their efforts to create a brand identity for their libraries.

So, what is missing from information professionals' efforts to formulate strategy for libraries? How can we approach strategic planning so that we can better meet the evolving needs of our communities? And how can we use strategic planning to improve our libraries' public relations, public outreach, brand image, and other initiatives that would benefit from specifically targeted strategies?

Channeling Ideas into Action

I submit that we need to focus on the more holistic approach of *strategic engagement*, which involves developing a strategically oriented culture for the long-term health and success of the organization. In this article, I will

address the nuts and bolts of sparking strategic engagement within an information organization through a continuous cycle of strategic thinking, strategic planning, and strategic execution. I will also discuss the importance of building new organizational rituals and habits, investing in communication channels, and telling a compelling strategy story.

Strategic thinking. One thing we should clear up right away is the difference between strategic thinking and strategic planning. Strategic thinking can be defined as a continuous effort to use one's intuition and insights to come up with new ideas for the business that may result in a competitive advantage.

While the business-oriented nature of this concept might be off-putting, the reality is that libraries are operating in a competitive field where our value to the community is being challenged, and we need to embrace that challenge. Our intuitions, insights and creativity are needed to ensure that the library will continue to be an important resource for the public good. Ideally, strategic thinking should be encouraged at all levels so that it becomes an accepted part of the culture.

In contrast with strategic thinking, strategic planning is the channeling of

RAJESH SINGH is an assistant professor in the School of Library and Information Management at Emporia State University in Emporia, Kansas. He is deeply interested in the leadership and management of libraries and conducts research on the marketing and branding of library organizations. His professional Website is lisrajesh.com, and he can be reached at rsingh1@emporia.edu.



ideas into an action plan to accomplish the goals and objectives of the organization. The main difference between strategic thinking and strategic planning is that the former should occur on a regular basis as part of a library's day-to-day activities, while the latter usually occurs at a prescribed time on an annual basis (Horwath 2009). However, it is much more typical that strategic planning occurs in isolation rather than being a direct result of a culture of ongoing strategic thinking. As a consequence, the term *strategic planning* is erroneously overused in organizations as a means to accomplish competitive advantage, whereas creating a culture of strategic thinking often gets ignored and overlooked.

To create a culture of strategic thinking, it is important that library leaders and managers invite stakeholders to participate in the development of the new strategic profile of the library or information organization. One of the best ways to embed strategic thinking into the organization is to continuously involve stakeholders, because the ability to think from their perspective is critical to effectively addressing their needs.

Strategic execution. Often, we pay very close attention to the development of a strategic plan, but our execution of the plan falls short. In a study conducted by the Economist Intelligence Unit, 57 percent of organizations were found to be unsuccessful at executing strategies over a three-year period (Neuharth 2007).

Strategic execution is often overlooked because it doesn't have the cachet of a staff retreat at an offsite location, nor does it involve the fanfare of a new program, service or facility launch. On the contrary, strategic execution involves the sort of roll-up-your-sleeves, detail-oriented, tedious but necessary work needed to breathe life into strategy. Without strategic execution, all you are left with is a dead strategy (Horwath 2009).

To successfully execute a strategic plan, the library staff must be able to relate personally to the issues addressed by the initiative and must possess

If a library intends to increase its visibility in social media, it won't be adequate simply to create a Facebook or Twitter profile.

a deep understanding of how these issues contribute to the betterment of the library and the community's library experience. Achieving such a level of buy-in will encourage any necessary changes in work habits and behavior needed to facilitate the development of a new service model that will be valued by the community.

Inherent in this process is the concept of clarity—clarity about the new library strategy, the new direction, the new goals, the new vision and mission, the new roles, and the new required behaviors. However, this degree of clarity of strategy is difficult to achieve. Doing so requires that we build and implement an efficient system of communication that will lead to a shared understanding of new strategies and engage staff in the pursuit of the library's new strategic direction.

Leadership and Communication

No strategic initiative will yield a fruitful outcome unless new organizational routines and habits are developed in support of implementation. Organizational cultures can range from positive to chaotic to dysfunctional, and library organizations are no exception. A 2012 Gallup poll found that only 30 percent of people were "engaged" in their work, while 52 percent were "not engaged" and 18 percent were "actively disengaged" (Harter 2012). These findings highlight two important activities that should occur before undertaking any strategic initiative—first, you must take steps to encourage employee engagement, and second, you must cultivate more functional and strategy-oriented organizational habits.

A strategic initiative is a collaborative and purposeful adventure that requires building excellent, open and transparent communication channels throughout the organization in pursuit of its strategic goals. Clear, consistent communication across all levels of the organization is critical to strategic thinking, planning and execution. Achieving this goal can be a challenge, and indeed, many organizations find it difficult to keep meetings short, focused and productive. As a result, there is often more discussion of tangential issues than strategic initiatives.

Let's say your strategic initiative is a horse—you may end up with a zebra after your staff has reinterpreted it, and while a zebra might still be acceptable, you definitely don't want to end up with a chicken (De Flander 2012). We need to communicate our message clearly, consistently and effectively to instill the strategy into the heads, hearts and hands of our staff. Communication can involve individual conversations, group meetings, intranet discussion postings, and/or memos detailing information about shifts in strategy. Successful strategy execution depends heavily on a conscious effort to build effective intra-organizational communication with a message that is clear, consistent, honest and inspirational.

For instance, if a library intends to increase its visibility in social media, it won't be adequate simply to create a Facebook or Twitter profile. Rather, this initiative will require systematic planning prior to execution. Library professionals will need to determine how to engage their user community in meaningful ways so as to provide robust, compelling and memorable library experiences

Satisfy people's craving to be part of an interesting story by building it around your information organization's new strategic initiatives. A strategy story, told properly, is an adventure that invites other colleagues to join the cause.

using social media. At the same time, this new virtual library experience must remain aligned and consistent with the library's other services (or the other services must come into alignment with it). The most critical components will be creating a shared understanding of the new social media initiative and its implications for library staff and leadership, and making sure that all are committed to supporting this purposeful strategic adventure.

Be careful not to fall into the trap of assuming that mere compliance implies commitment. Senge (2006), for one, believes that "Ninety percent of the time, what passes for commitment is compliance." This type of disconnect should not occur if staff are explicitly and meaningfully involved in all stages, including being encouraged to think strategically, participating in the process of strategic planning, and, of course, playing an integral role in strategic execution.

Avoid any sort of commanding or heavy-handed management style that might discourage staff from expressing their thoughts, perspectives and viewpoints freely. Instead, leaders should make every effort to encourage, value and respect staff members' diverse opinions.

Telling Your Strategy Story

If you commit to this process of strategic engagement, you will have a strategy story to tell. Jamie LaRue, director of the Douglas County libraries in Colorado, has shared his library strategy stories with my students on more than one occasion. In doing so, he has helped us

understand how his organization's strategy evolved and refocused over time and the impacts it has had on the community they serve. Similarly, Pamela Sandlian-Smith, director of Denver's Rangeview Public Libraries (rebranded as "Anythink Libraries"), has a fascinating story to tell about developing a new brand identity in the quest to become a community hub.

The process of strategic engagement can truly be an adventure. People love stories. Even a boring memo on budgeting or SMART goals has the potential to become part of an interesting story. Your strategy story needs to be simple and easy to repeat, so that word can spread easily.

Satisfy people's craving to be part of an interesting story by building it around your information organization's new strategic initiatives (Hauden 2008). A strategy story, told properly, is an adventure that invites other colleagues to join the cause, whether it is to provide new programming and services to underserved populations, create a new library image, or develop new touchpoints for the community. A well-articulated strategy story can create excitement and welcome staff to be part of something bigger than themselves, to feel as if they belong, and to see clearly how everyone's efforts contribute to the success of the strategy.

Engaging in meaningful dialogue is at the heart of strategic organizational change, and it must be encouraged by leaders and managers. Never forget that the most sophisticated strategies are worthless if people don't feel compelled to embrace them. **SLA**

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10 Questions: Kimberly Silk

SERVING AS A CHAPTER PRESIDENT AND CHAIRING A TASK FORCE ARE KEEPING HER BUSY THIS YEAR, BUT KIM SILK INTENDS TO CONTINUE PUSHING BOUNDARIES.

BY SUZANNE ARIST

For someone who was lukewarm toward librarianship and wasn't sure she would fit in until she found she could apply her library skills to positions in data services and digital media, Kimberly Silk spends a considerable amount of time promoting and advancing the profession.

This year alone, she's serving as president of the SLA Toronto Chapter and past president of the Faculty of Information Alumni Association, plus she's chairing a task force that is examining diversity within SLA's membership. She's constantly engaged in what she calls "pushing the boundaries" of librarianship, meaning she wants to shatter traditional stereotypes of librarians and position them as leaders. And she's keen to "divorce" libraries from librarians so the latter will be valued for their knowledge and expertise, not the collections they oversee.

"Our value is that information management is the lens through which we see the world," she says. "It's not about the books, or the collection, or the building. We may use our collection and our building to fulfill that mandate, but the value is in *us* and our expertise, not the things we manage."

Information Outlook interviewed Kim as 2012 was drawing to a close and she was preparing to scale back some of her commitments so she can devote sufficient time to her SLA duties. But when her year as chapter president is finished and the task force completes its work, it's a good bet that Kim will take on additional volunteer roles.

"There is a lot of value to developing yourself as a leader," she says. "It teaches you a great deal about yourself—and in life, whether at work or at play, everyone is a leader at some time."

When did you know you wanted to be a librarian, and what do you enjoy most about it?

It took me quite a long time to realize that librarianship was a vocation worth pursuing. While I did work as an apprentice in my high school library, I was very sure that I did not want to be a conventional librarian. Throughout my undergrad years, I fell in love with the libraries at the University of Waterloo—not the buildings, but the fact that an entire universe of knowledge was open and available to me. Having access to unlimited knowledge inspired me to apply for library school, but it wasn't until I met librarians in roles such as data and systems that I realized there was a place for me in librarianship.

On your Website, you describe yourself as "keenly interested in pushing the boundaries of what it means to be a librarian and a leader in the 21st century." What boundaries are you pushing these days, and what do you hope to accomplish?

I'm interested in redefining librarianship—specifically, what the average person has in mind when they think of what a librarian looks like, and what we do in our jobs. The stereotype that exists is a tough one to shatter, and the best approach is to keep expanding our sphere of influence in every kind of

SUZANNE ARIST is a reference librarian in Illinois. She writes for the SLA Illinois Chapter's *Informant* and other publications.

organization.

Our value is that information management is the lens through which we see the world. In that sense, we're similar to MBAs, who see the world in business terms. We work within organizations to ensure that information is managed well and in a way that supports the goals of the organization.

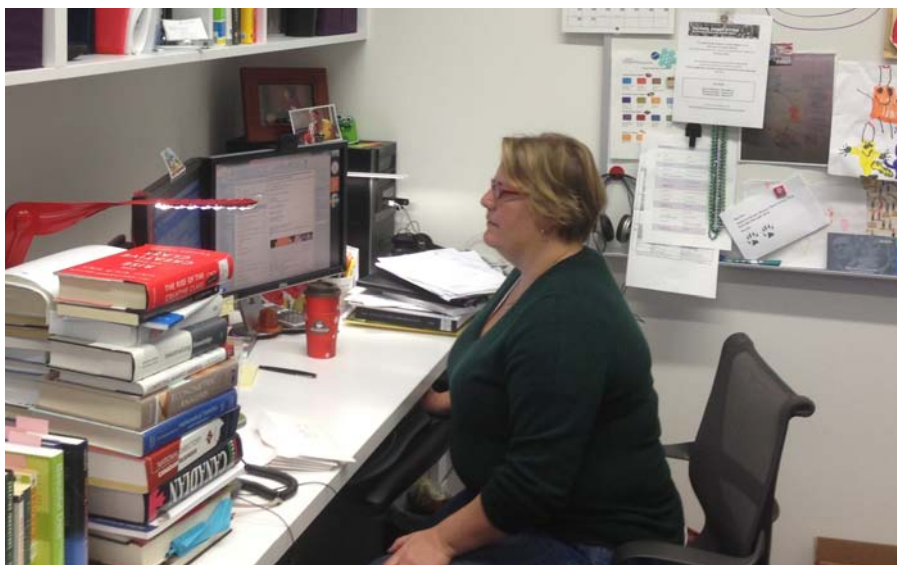
I also have been developing a belief that to evolve further, we need to divorce the library from the librarian. It's not about the books, the collection, or the building. Our value is in how we *communicate, deliver and distribute* information to people so they can gain knowledge and wisdom. We may use our collection and our building to fulfill that mandate, but the value is in *us* and our expertise, not the things we manage.

In terms of leadership, there is a lot of opportunity for our profession in how we lead ourselves and our colleagues and how we work as role models within our organization. Leadership comes from within—leadership is about how I choose to present myself, my beliefs, and my vision. Successful leaders are surrounded by people who want to be a part of their vision. It's not about "follow me"; it's more a case of, "I'm going this way, would you like to come along?"

I believe in leading by example, not by what an organizational structure might dictate. I would like to see more librarians embrace leadership, even if they don't have an interest in managing others. There is a lot of value to developing yourself as a leader, because it teaches you a great deal about yourself—and in life, whether at work or at play, everyone is a leader at some time.

You clearly are passionate about the library profession, so much so that you're active in several professional organizations: the Faculty of Information Alumni Association, the Ontario Library Association, and the Canadian Library Association, not to mention SLA. Why so many? Are you concerned about spreading yourself too thin?

Toronto is a uniquely wonderful place to be a librarian because I am sur-



Kim works at her desk in the Martin Prosperity Institute, a think tank at the University of Toronto.

rounded by so many colleagues within a relatively small geographic area. It's easy to be involved in multiple organizations, since meetings and events tend to occur within the downtown Toronto area. Many of us in Toronto are involved in multiple organizations, and there are ways to be involved on committees that are manageable and not too time consuming. That said, 2013 will be my busiest year yet—I'm president of the SLA Toronto Chapter—so I've cut back on other activities to make sure I can achieve my goals.

How and why did you become involved with SLA?

While in library school, I investigated the various professional associations and found SLA to be the best fit for me. I love the diversity of SLA—everyone has the most fascinating jobs. The fact that SLA is an international organization is also attractive, especially in a world where so much information we manage is digital and borderless.

You've agreed to chair a task force on SLA member demographics and diversity. What's the goal of this task force, and why did you decide to participate in this effort?

A word to the wise: never pose a question to the SLA president unless you're ready to be part of the solution!

Back in July at the SLA 2012 Annual Conference, during the joint cabinet meeting, there was a discussion about how much we knew about SLA members. I suggested to Brent Mai that we take a look at the SLA membership form to see what data could be analyzed from the form, and before you knew it, I was leading a task force on adjusting the membership form so that we could learn more about our colleagues, with a view to making the association more responsive to member needs.

As you noted earlier, you're serving as president of the SLA Toronto Chapter this year. What are your goals for the chapter during your presidency?

In Toronto, we are fortunate to have a very healthy community of information professionals. A good number of us are SLA members, but there are many who are part of other associations, and in 2012 we began partnering on events. For 2013, the Toronto Chapter will be building on these partnerships, working with organizations such as SCIP, ARMA and AIIM.

The benefit to SLA members is that we will expand our perspectives in terms of the kinds of roles information professionals can take on. There are so many career opportunities for information professionals, many of which do

not necessitate a background in library science. If we are going to expand our sphere of influence professionally, we need to expand our view in terms of what it takes to be an information professional. Not all info pros are librarians. That's a good thing.

What do you mean by "expand our sphere of influence?"

Traditionally, librarians have worked in libraries. Today, information comes in multiple media formats, is everywhere, and impacts decision making in all sectors and industries. Librarians are uniquely trained to manage information to ensure that decision makers have access to high-quality information while reducing the rest of the noise. Whether we call ourselves librarians, knowledge managers, information managers, or whatever, our skills and expertise can be a competitive advantage to every organization.

From 2001-2009, you were a self-employed digital media consultant; since then, you've been the data librarian at the Martin Prosperity Institute, a think tank at the University of Toronto's Rotman School of Management. Why did you become a consultant, and why did you change course and take the job at MPI?

I became self-employed in 2001 when I was laid off from my job as a digital media manager at a large Canadian telecommunications company. It was the time of the "dot-bomb," when many organizations lost faith in new media and closed down many departments and start-ups that had burned through money and believed that proven business tactics were boring and old-fashioned.

I was fortunate to find a variety of contracts to keep me busy—I partnered with colleagues with much more experience who could show me the ropes. After a few years, I was doing well enough that I was able to choose the work I wanted to do and be less dependent upon taking any contract for the cash flow.

My work with the Martin Prosperity Institute began as a contract where I

built the infrastructure and information architecture for their data library. As time went on, I was at the MPI more and more and was spending less time with other clients. In 2009, I joined the MPI as a full-time data librarian.

The decision to transition back to a job within an organization was good timing for me. I have a young son at home, and the university allows me the work style and flexibility I need as a parent. But life is always changing, and I would never rule out returning to consulting someday. Having worked in the private sector, for myself and in academia, has given me a broad perspective, and I value that.

Now that you've been in the profession for several years, do you partner with less experienced colleagues to show them the ropes?

As past president of my iSchool's alumni association, I do a lot of mentoring. I've worked with many students and new graduates to give them some real-world exposure to the kind of work that goes on in my workplace.

You're an amateur genealogist. What sparked your interest in this field, and what striking things have you learned about your ancestors?

I blame my maternal grandfather. When I was a kid, he would tell me that Laura Secord, an important Canadian historical figure, was my ancestor. During the War of 1812, American officers had forced their way into the Secord home and demanded to be served dinner. Laura eavesdropped on the officers, learning of an impending American attack at Beaver Dams with the intention of capturing Upper Canada. She is known to have walked over 19 miles from her home to where Lieutenant FitzGibbon was stationed at the British garrison, warning him just in time and stopping the American invasion.

The story of the bravery of Laura Secord is well known by many Canadians, and I had to find out more. As it turns out, neither my grandfather nor I are direct descendants of Laura Secord, though there is an indirect

connection. But the result is that I have become addicted to genealogy, and I spend many happy hours figuring out all the interesting twists and turns in my family tree. Right now I am exploring my father's branch of the tree. It's an exciting time, as I have a hunch my paternal great-grandmother may have murdered her first husband! **SLA**



The collection at MPI is integrated into the research area (top) and lobby (above) of the library.

Cataloging a Collection of Software Applications

ASKED TO ORGANIZE A COLLECTION OF NEARLY 2,000 SOFTWARE APPLICATIONS, THE AUTHOR TURNED TO CATALOGING THEORY.

BY ABIGAIL MOFFAT WICKES, MLS

In May 2012 I received my master's degree in library science, and like most of my classmates I was a bit unnerved by the uncertain prospects for employment. During my somewhat frantic job search, I came across a posting from a large legal research company that needed someone to conduct a data analysis and develop a description and taxonomy of a collection of nearly 2,000 software applications. Although the word *librarian* appeared nowhere in the job description or requirements, the hiring manager had recognized that the position required skill sets that overlap with those of MLS and MIS graduates, so he had sent the posting to my school's job listserv.

When the task of creating order out of these software applications became my responsibility, I was excited to apply

my skills to a collection that had never been touched by librarians (I'm the first librarian in my office). To provide some context for the project, these software applications had been developed and individually customized for about 1,200 clients to use when conducting legal research. The applications had been created over a period of approximately 10 years by a rotating team of programming interns, and not everyone (or, in some cases, anyone) on the current team had been present when a given application was created or last modified.

This rotating team was also responsible for the limited amount of metadata associated with the applications. Although the metadata generally were helpful in terms of determining which information was valuable to the team, they had been created over a long peri-

od of time by many individuals (none of whom had been trained in information management) and thus were not always standardized or up to date. They also had been created from the perspective of "back-end users"—Web designers, developers, and programmers. As a result, a certain level of technical expertise and familiarity was required for comprehension.

Another complexity inherent in the project is that software applications are created, deleted and modified on a daily basis. The collection as a whole is mutable, so the data associated with it have to be specific enough to answer detailed questions but coarse-grained enough to stay accurate without needing constant maintenance.

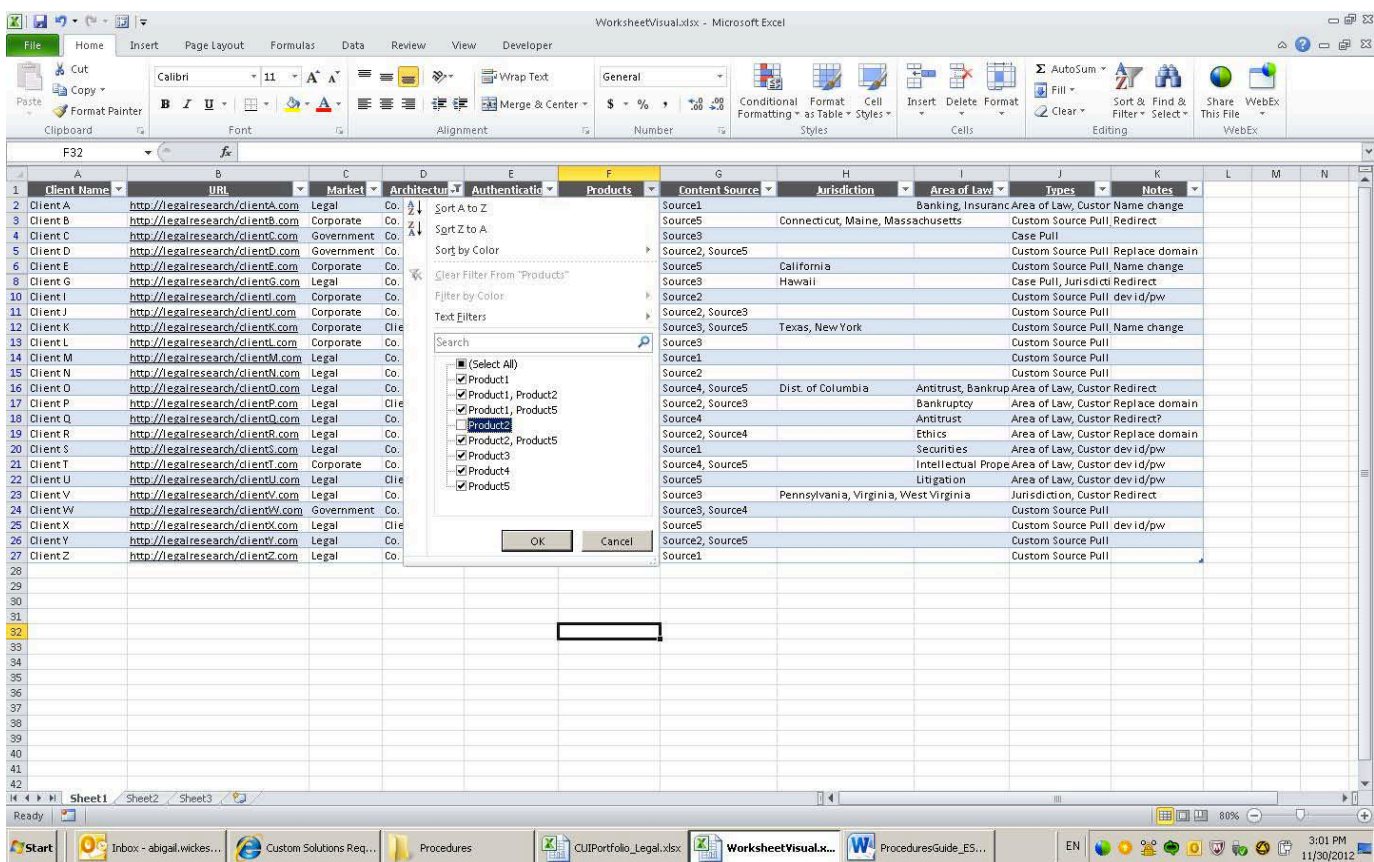
Using Cataloging Theory

In assessing the scope of the project, I



ABIGAIL WICKES is a software application librarian at LexisNexis and a recent graduate of the School of Information and Library Science at the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill, where she focused on cataloging and special library work. She previously completed two internships that involved cataloging images and audiovisual materials. She blogs at abigailmwickes.wordpress.com and can be reached at abigailmwickes@gmail.com.

FIGURE 1: SOFTWARE APPLICATIONS WORKSHEET



soon identified two pressing needs: (1) a need for more detailed information about the applications for both front- and back-end users, and (2) a need to recognize prevalent similarities and develop a taxonomy based on these identified groupings. Once these two priorities were established, it became clear that I could approach the project using skills I had learned while completing my library degree. I had taken as many cataloging classes as possible during library school, and through this coursework I had become familiar with a recurring theme: although the specific *practices* of cataloging are often changing, the *theory* behind them will hold up even as the items, methods, and tools with which we catalog evolve. For example, Dublin Core is a metadata scheme that draws from the theory and process of bibliographic cataloging but offers a distilled version of description that can be applied more swiftly to a variety of entities (Understanding Metadata 2004).

With this thought in mind, I decided

to approach the challenge of cataloging the software applications by thinking of them in terms of cataloging theory, specifically Functional Requirements for Bibliographic Records (FRBR). When I learned about FRBR during my first semester of library school, it was one of many acronyms I dutifully copied into my notebook without completely comprehending its meaning or significance. As I completed more coursework, FRBR's usefulness and adaptability became much clearer to me.

FRBR is a conceptual model that is helpful to consider when thinking about organizing and describing items in a way that is consistent and will enable users to find what they need. As Barbara Tillett (2003) explains, FRBR was created as a model for the bibliographic universe but “intended to be independent of any cataloging code or implementation.” Because it was developed to be applicable to any sort of taxonomic or organizational scheme, FRBR seemed like a good place to start in cataloging the software application

collection.

Although there are multiple conceptual groupings in FRBR, I referred primarily to Group 1 entities when planning this project. Group 1 entities include work, expression, manifestation, and item. To explain these entities a bit more for readers who are new to FRBR (or haven't thought about it since taking a perfunctory cataloging class), I'll adapt an example used in my metadata course that helped me understand and remember the different Group 1 entities and what they mean.

- *Work*—the concept or idea of the entity
 - Example: “Across the Universe” by the Beatles
- *Expression*—different ways the concept or idea is realized
 - Example: the 1970 *Let it Be* version of the song, the 2009 remixed *Let it Be... Naked* version of the song, or the World Wildlife Federation version of the song

My librarian training led me to believe that anything can be cataloged, and with the success of this effort, my belief has been confirmed.

(which incorporates birdsong)

- *Manifestation*—formats in which you can ingest (read, watch, or listen to) the expression(s)
 - Example: the LP, CD, or MP3 versions of any of the expressions mentioned above
- *Item*—a distinct, tangible, specific manifestation
 - Example: the “Across the Universe” track on a well-worn copy of the 1970 *Let it Be* LP

When cataloging, information about two different books, DVDs, or software applications may be the same at the work level but different at the expression, manifestation and item levels. Not only does FRBR serve as a framework for making these cataloging decisions, it also provides specific terminology to use when describing concepts in cataloging. This makes having conversations about the workflow of cataloging a lot easier—when using FRBR terminology, both parties can be confident that they are referring to the same intangible concept rather than slightly different intangible concepts.

An Evolving Worksheet

Since a work is an overarching concept or idea, I began to think about the applications in terms of their essential purpose and how they answered clients’ research needs. An application can answer a research need in many different ways with many different layouts, but the essence of the application is that it was created to solve a certain research problem. As I began to identify recurring “types” of applications that answered the same essential research problems in various ways, the begin-

nings of the taxonomic structure started to emerge.

By acknowledging the many ways a research need can be answered, I was able to begin thinking about applications in terms of expressions. To illustrate this point further, consider a type of application we named Case Pull—an application that provides access to various court cases used in legal research. A Case Pull application can have a simple interface with one text search bar or many text search bars with different pre-filter options, each of which is a different expression of the Case Pull concept or work.

Taking this approach a step further, I noted that software applications can be viewed on many different platforms, including mobile phones, touch screen kiosks, and computer screens. The different ways applications are accessed by clients can be thought of as different manifestations, since the format affects how the application is optimally ingested. Finally, the customized application with a unique URL can effectively be considered an item.

Just as FRBR Group 1 entities have murky edges in the bibliographic world, applying them to software applications is not always a clear-cut process. For example, if modifications to an application completely change the application’s look and feel, it would be tempting to consider the separate iterations as different items. However, aesthetic changes are readily compared to replacing the binding of a book—the item may look different, but the purpose has not changed. Similar to a call number, the URL acts as a unique identifier as well as an indicator that you are looking at a distinct Item that retains its uniqueness despite cosmetic alterations. Software

applications can also be thought of as similar to integrating resources—although the content may change as clients’ subscriptions to resources are renewed or expire, the application as a whole remains a single Item.

Thinking about software applications in terms of FRBR Group 1 entities implicitly created a checklist of important characteristics to document, but this checklist was in many ways already present in the way the programmers on my team think and talk about creating and modifying applications. What was missing was an organized record of this thought process, and adding a librarian to the team allowed intrinsic concepts about applications to migrate from the minds of the programmers into an organized, searchable form. We now have an evolving worksheet (see Figure 1) that provides many other company employees with crucial information about these applications, and it is easy for users to sort and filter to identify the groupings that are relevant to them.

FRBR identifies concepts that are inherent in entities we organize and describe, and although it has origins in the library, it is versatile enough to work in many arenas. Using FRBR Group 1 entities was a great way to starting considering not only what information about individual software applications would be useful for different users, but also how to identify similarities and relationships within the collection of applications as a whole. The effectiveness of this approach has also demonstrated to me the value of my MLS—my librarian training led me to believe that anything can be cataloged, and with the success of this effort, my belief has been confirmed. **SLA**

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Curb Your Frustration in Eight Steps

Use your frustration as motivation to reconsider your purpose, renew your passion, and revitalize your career.

BY STEPHEN ABRAM, MLS

Well, it's a new year with a 13 in it. Any triskaidecaphobics out there?

Fear of the number 13 is irrational, but there are plenty of emotions that are rational, and you may be feeling one or more of them at this time of year (especially if it's winter where you live). For example, is your job driving you crazy? Your boss? Your customers? Is technological change making you crazy? Feeling like you can't keep up? Are you thinking a lot about quitting, retiring, vacationing, or abandoning your dreams?

These feelings are normal, and every information professional worth his or her salt has been there. If you care, you get frustrated, angry, impatient or sad. Whenever you experience one of those emotions, you have to spend some time considering your choices and reconnecting with your passion. Passion drives most of us—it's what keeps us going and pushes us to make a difference.

My secret, which really isn't a secret at all, is that I use frustration as a signal. Is it telling me to change course or try a different tactic? Is it alerting me that conditions have changed and I haven't? By viewing frustration as a clue that

something is ailing me or my project, I can use it as a prompt to take a break and rethink. That always works.

Sometimes I change jobs, because I think I am happier building as opposed to managing. Sometimes I realize I need to do a check-up or have a meeting. Perhaps I'm not optimizing things to achieve our goals. All in all, I see frustration as a sign that I need to reflect, reconsider and adjust.

You should, too. Perhaps no one has told you this lately, but you matter. Librarians matter. Information matters. So, before you throw in the towel or wallow in self-pity, let's think about how to curb some of your frustration so you can get back to striving for success, innovating, and seeking fame and fortune (well, maybe not fortune). Let's move on and make a difference in the world.

Step 1: Stop whining. You are not working in a coal mine. You're not in a war or experiencing famine. And you haven't been sentenced to life in prison for a crime you did not commit. You're simply at one career stage, and you're heading for another. Feeling sorry for yourself or making things out to be worse than they really are will only make

it more difficult to evolve and grow professionally.

I get that you want greater respect for your work (and, occasionally, some thanks). You want the recognition you deserve. This is when you need to dig deep and rediscover the reason you started out in this field in the first place. Avoid conversations that blame "them" and seek out those that lead to ideas, actions and solutions.

Step 2: Re-find your purpose. There was a time early on when you chose a career and got excited. You had an idea, acquired a degree and learned a way to help others. You had a dream and a goal. Sure, you thought you might also be able to make some money at it along the way, but it wasn't originally (and shouldn't ever be) just about money. There was a greater purpose behind it—something you were passionate about, something so strong you were willing to put additional time and effort into your education and take the risk that you might not find employment.

Eventually, someone recognized your potential and hired you. Over the years, people mentored you and advised you and provided you with developmental opportunities. People trusted you to work on their projects or answer their questions.

Now you worry sometimes that you might have lost sight of your purpose. It didn't happen intentionally—it just took a back seat as you started to focus on other stuff and got lost in the weeds of e-book issues, library policies, technological changes, and budget cuts. You need to rediscover and reconnect with your purpose. It's easy to do. To start, just change your focus.

Step 3: Change your focus. If you're frustrated, take a look at where you are focusing your attention. Chances are it's on some numbers you don't control, or on a handful of customers or team members with whom you inter-

STEPHEN ABRAM is vice president of strategic partnerships and markets for Gale Cengage Learning. He is a past president of SLA, the Ontario Library Association and the Canadian Library Association. He is the author of *Out Front with Stephen Abram* (ALA Editions 2007) and a personal blog, *Stephen's Lighthouse*. Stephen would love to hear from you at stephen.abram@gmail.com.



act. Librarians often serve hundreds of happy customers every week, but too often we focus on the few poor experiences that occur. Some people are just negative; we don't need to internalize that.

When you're overly focused on bad numbers or interactions, it affects the quality of your work and how you feel about it. It affects your tone and your audience, and your customers and colleagues notice. And make no mistake—

Your goals need to be personally exciting, and you need to believe you can accomplish them with effort.

if you're negative, you end up contributing to the workplace culture problem instead of being part of the solution. The future starts to look dark instead of bright and becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

If you have to focus on numbers, start by focusing on those over which you have more control: how often you succeed, or how many times you get to do what you love (teaching, coaching, writing, planning, learning, innovating, whatever). I don't mean you should turn a blind eye to the number of suboptimal interactions you're having, just that you should stop checking on the negative so often. If you start tracking the good stuff, you'll find that you make more time for it—and you'll do the ugly stuff more efficiently to make time for the stuff that thrills your passions.

Step 4: Stop checking your statistics so often. We're all guilty of it. You check your circs, your budget performance, your timesheets, your billable hours, your Google Analytics and more. Stop it. Seriously, just schedule it and don't get mired in the stuff. Start measuring what matters instead of what can be counted easily. After all, if you're not using statistics to drive positive change, why have them in the first place?

Try checking your stats only once a week and review what needs to be decided. If your work is good and you love it, it will show and you'll grow over time and be more successful. You just need to have faith (and no, I am not a Pollyanna!).

Step 5: Have faith. If you don't believe you have something of value to share, something that's needed, then your users and clients won't, either. It will come across in your work and your

interpersonal interactions and in every class you teach.

Do you do just enough or do you go above and beyond? Above and beyond performance comes from attitude more than aptitude. You can't control time, only how you use it. Do you care about your subject matter, and are you passionate about it? When you care, the source of your energy grows. Passion, energy, and motivation come from inside you, not from outside.

You need to feel passionate about what you do and where you are. Believing in yourself will get through the hard times. When something is keeping you awake at night, is it because you're unhappy or because you care enough to want to work harder on a problem or project, knowing it can be done better? Tip the balance in your favor and, with faith in yourself, you can accomplish your goals.

Step 6: Set realistic goals. Frustration can derive from goals that are too far out of reach for you to get excited about or are too big or fuzzy for you to see your own significant contribution. Your goals need to be personally exciting, and you need to believe you can accomplish them with effort, even if there's a little stretch in them.

Your goals can be in the context of your employer's goals—just find your own significant place in their plan, one that aligns with your passions and goals. Take time to talk about them and involve others, including those in power positions. Get excited about them, and stay committed. Be real.

Step 7: Stay committed. You've come far—you have a job, and you have users, students, and/or clients. You have a purpose and reasonable goals. The challenge is to stay committed. Don't lose sight of your dream. You *can* win and feel good.

Understand that being committed means giving your best, even when you don't know the best answer or the best path to take. It means being flexible even when things get tough. And when things get tough (which they will), look to others for inspiration.

Step 8: Look to others for inspiration. You aren't the only one who has struggled to find motivation and happiness. Wishing gets you nowhere; *doing* builds muscle and skills.

Use your network. Share. Build your associations—don't just be a quiet member. Learn new things. Take courses. Read. Engage in continuous learning. Have some fun, even if you have to schedule it!

Use your frustration to motivate you to have a great professional life. If you do, I know you'll succeed in the long term. If you can't, you eventually may have to consider changing to something that will make you truly happy. Just don't take your frustration forward with you.

(Hat tip and footnote for some of the words to Marc Ensign of MarcEnsign.com and NotAnotherSEOBlog.com, who inspired me with this post.) **SLA**

Making Good First Impressions (II)

Building relationships with new employees and clients can go a long way toward creating lasting support for libraries and their services.

BY JILL STRAND, MLIS

Last issue's "Market Share" column focused on the impact that first impressions can have, such as when working with vendors to implement new software or introducing library services to new clients. When I asked other SLA members to share examples of how they create good first impressions for new customers and clients, they set the bar quite high. Following are some of their responses, each of which offers an excellent best practice for making a great first impression.

Mimi Calter, assistant university librarian and chief of staff at the Stanford Libraries, shared how her team has implemented a training regimen for staff known as the Concierge Program. It consists of monthly meetings that provide background information on activities in individual library departments.

"We want to instill a sense of responsibility for customer service in all of our staff," says Mimi. "The monthly sessions are designed to give everyone a baseline understanding of the activity within a group, and to make sure they understand who to call when there's a patron who might need their services."

Richard Hulser, chief librarian for the Natural History Museum of Los Angeles County, says focusing on building rela-

tionships can play an important role. "As a librarian, a key thing I do with new clients is ensure they know there is a library and listen to what their information needs are," he says. "Most times, people are highly motivated to tell you what they do and what they need. Then I let them know how library services can help them achieve their goals and objectives. I have a case study example of a new unit formed in our Education Department by a new employee and a current employee wanting to set up a citizen science 'library'."

David Stern, associate dean for public services at the Milner Library at Illinois State University, says he uses two methods to help jump-start the process of engaging faculty: first, show them references to their articles and papers using one of the citation tracking tools (e.g., Web of Science or SCOPUS), then show them federated search options for finding citations to unusual references related to their research using non-standard indexing tools. "In both cases, the key is to provide self-referential materials that either save them time or provide immediate value," says David.

Several vendors shared their perspectives on how they welcome new customers to ensure a smooth transition to their

services. **JoAnne Kelley**, vice president of sales for Wolper Information Services, discussed her company's account set-up processes, which are designed to "perfectly align" Wolper's systems with the client's needs and preferences and anticipate and mitigate any potential roadblocks or issues.

"Most new clients have already demo'd our proprietary, cloud-based self-management tool, Wolperweb®," she says. "However, we also provide orientation and training sessions as well as support for any internal, client-side communications about Wolper and our service features and benefits. This is particularly true when the client is deploying our services as a solution within a decentralized organization."

Maura McGrath, knowledge management specialist at Mid-continent Research for Education and Learning (McREL), says one way she tries to make a good first impression is by maintaining a stellar reputation within the company. "Often I am talked up by others in the organization before I even have a chance to make an initial impression," she says. "But I always schedule an orientation for new employees within the first few weeks. This allows me to let them know our procedures as well as put a face to a name when asking for help. Also, we recently began creating subject guides related to terms that are often used in our organization. During the orientation, I point out where to find these subject guides."

Carol Bannen, director of information resources at Reinhart Boerner Van Deuren, says her library offers an orientation for new hires, then follows up with more specialized information. "After new associates have been on board for a month or so, we provide a legal



JILL STRAND is director of the Knowledge Services Library at the law firm of Maslon Edelman Borman & Brand in Minneapolis. She is an SLA Fellow, chair of the 2013 Conference Advisory Council, and secretary of the Leadership & Management Division. She previously served as chair of the SLA 2011 Nominating Committee and the Public Relations Advisory Council, as president of the SLA Minnesota Chapter, and as a member of the 2011 Conference Advisory Council. She can be reached at jillstrand@gmail.com.

research class aimed specifically at their area of law,” she says. “Additionally, the firm has an outside consultant that conducts the Associate Training Program (ATP), which covers many of the soft skills and business skills attorneys need to know. We were invited recently to a session called ‘Teamwork’ that was an overview of what a paralegal, secretary, librarian, and other support personnel can do to help the associate.”

Laying a Foundation

Tammy Bearden uses a checklist with new clients at Hallmark. First, she asks them about their role, the types of decisions they will be making, and the people they will be influencing to make decisions. Next, she tries to set a level of expectations, informs them of the services the library offers, and identifies news sources they may find helpful. She also lets them know the turn-around time for reference requests and explains how they can influence this time frame by including a deadline, providing context for the request, clarifying how much information they need, and indicating how the information will drive value for the business.

Naomi Bishop, research librarian for Ventana Medical Systems, says it is very important for her, as a solo librarian, to reach out to new employees quickly and assist them with their transition to the organization. At employee orientation sessions, she introduces new workers to the online virtual library, the research services available, and copyright issues in the workplace using a video from the Copyright Clearance Center.

“I always pass out my business card and bring free giveaways—pens, Post-It notes, or candy,” she says. “I often provide study materials for employees needing extra training or certification, and I offer to add new books to our collection if they are important to the employees’ field of work. I also meet with new senior managers and leadership to find out the dynamic information needs of the company.”

Susan Morley, manager of Information & Knowledge Management at the CSA Group in Toronto, talked about how

challenging it can be to provide information services and reach new clients and employees for a diverse organization with 23 offices in 9 countries. “My first step is to welcome them to the company by sending them a short e-mail, which includes a copy of a brochure outlining the Information Center’s services,” she says. “I then ensure they are included in any future e-mails announcing new services or changes to existing ones. I also provide or coordinate training sessions on these virtual resources—many of which are available as computer-based training—and at least once a year I request staff input for new or improved information resources. This encourages their buy-in to the resources and is an opportunity for them to provide feedback.”

David Hartman of the Global Business Technology Strategy Library at the Walt Disney Company said that a library orientation video is crucial to acclimating and informing new employees. “I use a video format to ensure that the depth and breadth of the message is conveyed with visual on-screen reinforcement,” he says. “Then I come into the room after the video for a 5-10 minute focus session.”

Rachel Berrington, director of client services for IEEE, noted how her firm’s client services managers work closely with account managers to help organizations get up to speed quickly on how to get the most out of their IEEE subscriptions. They make sure new subscribers are aware of the many tools available on IEEE’s Client Services Website, including the following:

- A “Getting Started Guide” with tools such as a launch checklist, tip sheets, e-mail templates, and customizable flyers as well as administrative tools to help customers manage their subscriptions.
- Training sessions offered through WebEx conferencing software, which allows IEEE to connect with multiple attendees at once. Some clients prefer to arrange an in-person session for a group. These sessions work as a great advertisement for the service

and educate both new and experienced users.

- Helpful links and tools, including OPAC links, open URL and title lists, branding opportunities, usage statistics, institutional administrative accounts, IP address information, and answers to common questions.

Jennifer Martin and **Cindy Elliott** at the University of Arizona Health Sciences Library and University of Arizona Libraries shared details about how they build rapport and establish connections. “Being visible and providing that personal touch can lay a foundation for a working relationship and open up the gates of communication,” they say. “First impressions are imperative in promoting your services and establishing a relationship. Not only do you have to be the face of information, but also a face to remember.”

Martin and Elliott recommend taking the following steps to market your services:

- Provide an orientation to your services;
- Give your “this is how I can help you” speech;
- Learn and remember your clients’ interests;
- Add a personalized touch;
- Keep in frequent contact;
- Have an “open door” policy;
- Get on the agenda of the new employee orientation; and
- Follow up with clients.

Some of these examples are good common-sense reminders, while others offer innovative new ideas that anyone can turn into best practices for creating strong and lasting relationships. All of them serve to illustrate the importance of making a positive first impression. Whether you work for a vendor, an information center, or a special library, a positive first impression can mean the difference between gaining or losing a new client or patron. **SLA**

The Nexus of Technology and Society

A new book shows how the rapid pace of innovation is creating solutions to problems once thought intractable.

BY MICHELE MASIAS, MLS

In what roles and economic sectors—science, technology, humanity, commerce, governance—do we envision ourselves as pillars of our evolving societies? As we look down the road of our own profession, do we see an abundantly better future?

I am fascinated by information technology and also care deeply about global issues, so reading *Abundance: The Future is Better Than You Think* by Peter Diamandis and Steven Kotler provided me with captivating insights into my interests as a librarian. Using anecdotes, research and statistics, the authors take a fresh look at how emerging technologies are pushing the boundaries of innovation to increase standards of living around the world. They expanded my understanding of the nexus between our evolving technology landscape and numerous pressing global issues.

Diamandis, chairman and CEO of the X Prize Foundation, can best be described as a super innovator committed to helping humanity by dispelling poverty. He is also chairman of Singularity University, which is why he discusses the evolution of traditional teaching methods. His co-author,

Steven Kotler, is an award-winning author and journalist and director of research at the Flow Genome Project.

In many ways, I found the authors' global views similar to those of Thomas Friedman and Malcolm Gladwell. These two "glass half full" authors use tangible analogies and interconnected research in attention-grabbing ways to help bring complex concepts into focus. Although the *Abundance* authors contend that the future is brighter than we think, they also temper their optimism in the face of economic upheaval, natural disasters, and cyberspace issues.

Abundant Technology

You might be wondering how this book relates to the information profession. I believe that information professionals don't have to look far to see how change and innovation are affecting our profession. Broadly speaking, library staffs across the globe are wrestling with challenging budgets, collection issues, changing customer expectations, and technological innovations, all of which constantly affect the way we manage and deliver information.

Reading *Abundance* and other such literature is one of the many ways

information professionals can identify changes looming on the horizon. These resources help us identify and understand the drivers of change so we can figure out what resources we'll need and, more importantly, discover what our customers may need as well.


The authors begin by framing historical trends and developments in relation to accessibility. In one example, they explain how aluminum was once more valuable than gold until a new aluminum distilling method drove down the price of that metal by 90 percent (p. 4). Their point is that "few resources are truly scarce; they're mainly inaccessible" (p. 6).

Taking the same approach to water and sunshine, Diamandis notes that technologies are being developed that will increase access to clean water and enhance our ability to capture the sun's energy. Both challenges are daunting, especially the former: roughly 1.1 billion people don't have access to safe water and 2.2 million children die each year from drinking contaminated water, with most of those affected residing in the African countryside (p. 92). Yet there are solutions on the horizon. For example, Dean Kamen, a physicist and entrepreneur who developed the "Slingshot" water purifying system, turned to Coca-Cola and its "enormous supply chain (the largest in Africa)" to help build, distribute, and maintain the Slingshot (p. 91).

As for energy, which Diamandis describes as "arguably the most important linchpin for abundance" (p. 155), more than two-thirds of the population in sub-Saharan Africa is still without electricity. *Abundance* asserts that entrepreneurial breakthroughs and decreasing costs will lead to the further



MICHELE MASIAS is head librarian of the Civil and Criminal Division Libraries for the Justice Libraries staff at the Department of Justice. She has more than 25 years of experience in a variety of federal government and Department of Defense libraries, including the Library & Research Services in the Executive Office of the President, the Defense Technical Information Center, and the Department of Interior Bureau of Reclamation Library. She can be reached at michele.masias@usdoj.gov.



adoption of solar, nuclear, wind, and biofuel energies, but Diamandis points out that energy production “is only part of the issue; how we distribute it is equally important” (p. 169). The development of the “smart grid” is being referred to as the next-generation Internet, or “Enernet”; once completed, it will lead to what Diamandis calls a “squanderable abundance of energy” (p. 170).

The authors build on this “abundant technology” theme by noting that a Masai warrior in Kenya with a cell phone in his hands has better mobile communication capabilities than the president of the United States did 25 years ago (p. 9). In India, more people have a smartphone than indoor plumbing. And if you have a smartphone, you have apps, meaning you have a plethora of knowledge available, literally, at your fingertips.

Today’s smartphones have the capacity to hold the entire contents of the books available in the New York Public Library, a beautiful beaux art building of brick, granite, and marble that takes up two city blocks. This is just one example of changes that are affecting collections, both physical and virtual, and forcing us to consider how we align the decrease in physical collections with the continued increase in electronic access to information. Whether through scroll, printed page, Web page, or app, the formats and ways in which we can access information are changing rapidly, heightening the need for information professionals to provide just-in-time information to patrons.

Exponential Growth

The authors also examine broader world issues and challenges, poverty being one of the most prevalent. They describe the progression of poverty-cutting measures around the world and discuss what is referred to as the “rising billion,” which constitute a third of the world’s poorest population. Thanks to technologies being developed and deployed (such as Kamen’s Slingshot and the smartphone), the “rising billion” are becoming better able

to improve their way of life. As they do, they will begin contributing to the global economy as never before. Most noteworthy, new technologies are driving a clear decline in global poverty rates, a trend that will continue for the foreseeable future.

Another trend being driven by new technologies is what Diamandis calls the “evolution of time.” After the dawn

Diamandis points out that the first iPhone, released in 2007, weighed a hundredth as much as the first “bleeding edge” Osborne Executive Portable computer, made 25 years earlier. Yet the iPhone had more than 100,000 times as much memory as the Osborne, and its processing speed was 150 times faster (p. 54). He goes on to say that Moore’s Law seems out of date given

Continuing to serve as adopters of technology and brokers of information will help ensure that information professionals remain relevant, continue to evolve, add value, and serve not just our clients but society at large.

of man, he says, fire and the artificial light it gives off created a surplus of time. Fast forward to today, and countless creations and discoveries have increased our ability to work, elevated our level of education, extended our leisure pursuits, improved our overall health, and, yes, given us more time to spend on Facebook. But these creations and discoveries, some of which took centuries to make a measurable impact on our free time, are nothing compared to what Diamandis calls the “Go-Fast Button,” which is what he predicts will result from the exponential growth of information technologies.

Diamandis expounds on this concept by using Ray Kurzweil’s theories to illuminate just how pervasive Moore’s Law really has been. Within a couple of decades, Kurzweil predicts, the average laptop will be “performing 100 million billion calculations per second—which would be equivalent to all the brains of the entire human race” (p. 55).

As information professionals, we clearly understand the history of exponential growth. Because of it, the most advanced secure digital cards can now store the entire collection of the Library of Congress—all 33 million books—in a small shoebox!

the ever-more-rapid deployment of new technologies, which are sometimes outdated before we even purchase them.

This technological acceleration seems to have no boundaries; indeed, today we can not only generate an enormous amount of data, but also see, hear, and capture it in what Diamandis refers to as the “Internet of things,” which he describes as a “self-configuring, wireless network of sensors interconnecting, well, all things” (p. 62). Not only does the Internet link computers, it seamlessly connects humans, enabling us to tweet, tumblr, blog, and reinvent the way we live and work.

The authors also don’t miss the opportunity to talk about YouTube, Facebook, and Twitter, which are creating social communication tidal waves around the globe (witness their impact on the Arab Spring). They point out that YouTube users “upload forty-eight hours’ worth of videos every minute” (p. 84), which is more entertainment than a year’s worth of Hollywood movie productions, and that there are more content providers in the developing world than in the developed world. Perhaps the most far-reaching impact of social media, Diamandis states, is its clout with respect to organizing societies.



Remaining Relevant

At this point, you may still be asking what technologies like the Internet of things, a Go-Fast Button, and lighting-speed gadgets have to do with the information profession. Well, leaders in our community like Roberta Shaffer, associate librarian for library services at the Library of Congress, and Stephen Abram, vice president of strategic partnerships and markets for Gale Cengage Learning, encourage information professionals to think strategically and keep abreast of innovations and future trends. Librarians and information professionals can learn a lot by heeding their advice and reading the works of futurists and authors like Peter Diamandis.

When I finished reading *Abundance*, I couldn't help but recall my childhood memories of watching "The Jetsons," a futuristic cartoon show, and marvel at how far we have come since then. The recent addition of Ava, a computerized,

hologram-like image programmed to answer questions asked frequently by passengers at New York-area airports, takes technology and customer service well beyond anything envisioned by the creators of "The Jetsons." Ava reminds me of the notably forward-looking, artificially intelligent New York Public Library hologram librarian, Vox 114, seen in the 2002 film *The Time Machine*. It seems to me that that our far-away future has arrived.

Our profession recognizes that knowledge is the foundation of discovery, invention, and innovation. While technology and change aren't necessarily the pathways to library nirvana, they're something we need to pay attention to, both locally and globally. We may not have created water purifiers or the smartphone, but I would say librarians have been instrumental in our own way, and we've been there every step of the way.

From the great library of Alexandria to

the Library of Congress, we have kept pace with—and, in most cases, enthusiastically adopted and embraced—changes and new technologies that have affected our work. The great libraries of the world were built long ago as repositories of knowledge, promoting discovery, invention and innovation and advancing the evolution of mankind. Continuing to serve as adopters of technology and brokers of information will help ensure that information professionals remain relevant, continue to evolve, add value, and serve not just our clients but society at large. **SLA**



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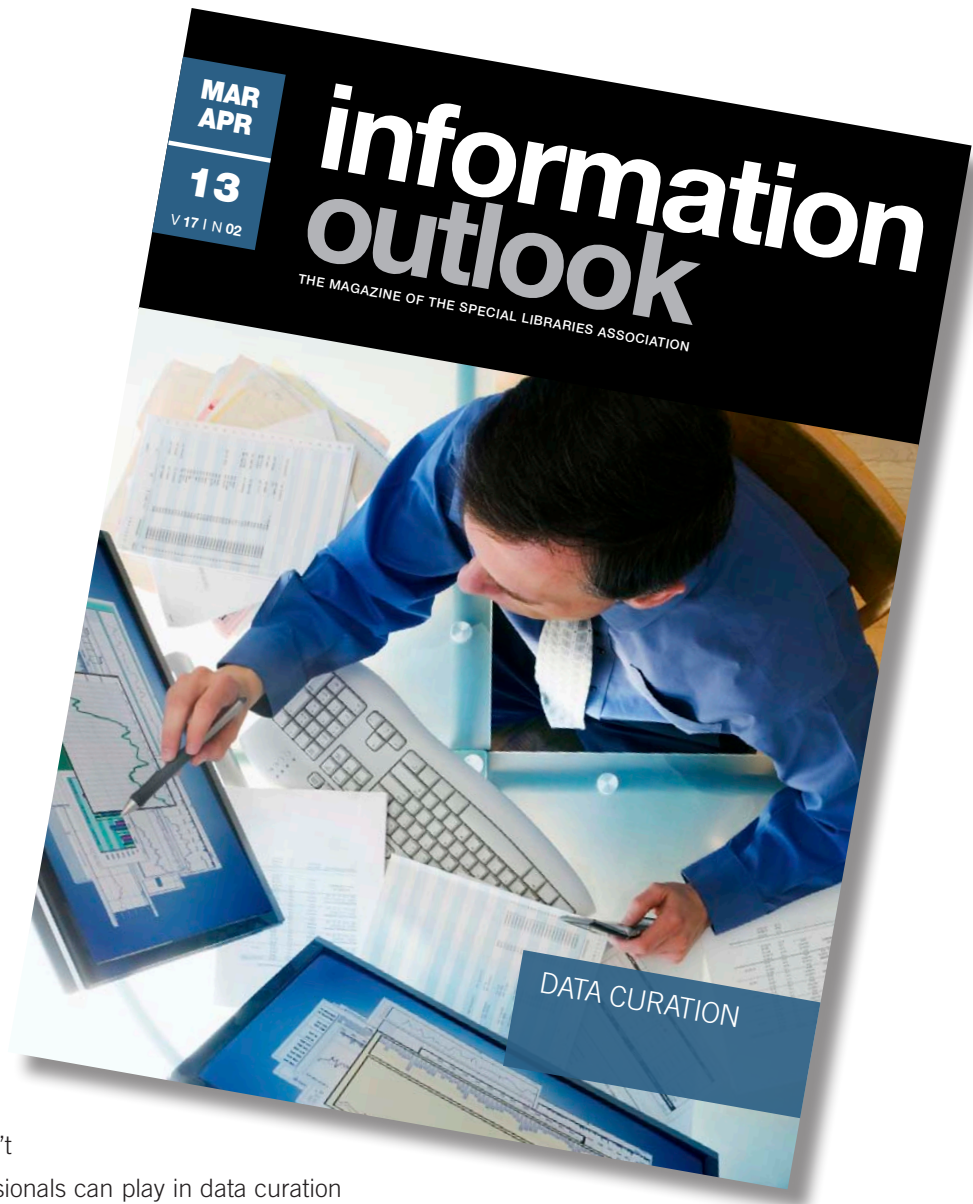
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